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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION APPROVES 211 FOR LANCASTER COUNTY

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Public Service Commission granted an application at its March 30 weekly meeting to allow 211 three-digit dialing for access to information and referrals for human services in Lincoln and Lancaster County.

The application was filed by United Way of the Midlands, headquartered in Omaha. United Way of the Midlands also operates information and referral services utilizing 211 dialing in the Omaha metropolitan area, including Dodge, Douglas, Pottawattamie, Sarpy and Saunders counties. The agency also provides the services in a four-county area with Grand Island as a hub. Efforts to include Scottsbluff, Kearney and North Platte are currently underway.

United Way of the Midlands requested the authority in Lancaster County as part of its growth plans that eventually could make the information and referral services available state-wide. It converted its Omaha referral service to 211 dialing in February 2002.

First District Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln, who represents Lancaster County and other southeast Nebraska counties, said, “We should have more efforts like this to make government services ‘user friendly.’ Too often people are passed from office to office without ever getting an answer. This ‘one-stop’ concept for information will be a great improvement over the current system.” Omaha Commissioner Anne Boyle added, “Helping families in crisis is only one of the benefits of 211. It will also help alleviate some of the burden on 911 personnel so that they may tend to emergency calls.”

United Way of the Midlands initially offered information and referral services in Omaha as a regular seven-digit telephone number, but later sought approval from the Public Service Commission to utilize 211 for access to the service because it is more easily remembered.

Other three-digit designations in use in Nebraska include 911 for emergency police, fire, and ambulance services; 711 for access to the Nebraska Relay Service operated by Hamilton Telephone; and 511 for road condition information.

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